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Incomplete Ištar Assimilation: Reconsidering the Goddess's Divine History in Light of a Madonnine Analogy

Abstract: The Semitic goddess Ištar is the most famous Mesopotamian goddess, and scholarly consensus favors viewing localized divine names as part of a larger Ištar constellation, including Ištar-of-Nineveh, Ištar-of-Arbela, and the Assyrian Ištar. This chapter explores the multiplicities surrounding the theonym Ištar, focusing primarily on the Neo-Assyrian period of the first millennium BCE. By privileging non-theologically speculative texts (e.g., letters, royal inscriptions, and treaties) over esoteric compositions (e.g., syncretic hymns and god lists), the distinctiveness of localized Ištar goddesses and other Mesopotamian goddesses will be demonstrated. Moreover, instead of examining multiplicity primarily from a singularity-to-fragmentary (or derivative) perspective as I did in *The Splintered Divine*, this chapter considers an incomplete-assimilation model, developed by analogy on the incomplete assimilation of the Catholic Our-Lady-of-Guadalupe and the pre-Colombian goddess Tonantzin.

The Akkadian goddess Ištar¹ is the most famous of the Mesopotamian goddesses, and with her fame came a myriad of identifications with non-Akkadian goddesses. These goddesses include those from other cultures: the Sumerian Inanna, the Hurrian-Hittite Šauška, the Levantine Astarte, and the Greek Aphrodite, along with the Roman Venus.² Given the planetary and passion connections common among many of these goddesses, both ancient and modern identifications of all these goddesses seem reasonable. Within the Akkadian-language world, some scholars have argued for Ištar's identification with other Mesopotamian goddesses, based on ancient syncretic hymns and god lists. These include Mullissu, Irnina, Damkianna, Gula, Išhara, Zarpānitu, and many others.³ A third category of Ištar identifications that has maintained scholarly

1 A special thanks to Joshua Jacobs II and Fabio Porzia for their help and suggestions on this essay.

2 See, for example, Barton 1893a, 131–165; and Barton 1893b–1894, 1–74; See also, Wegner 1981; Beckman 1998, 1–10; and Meinhold 2009.

3 See, for example, George 1992, 411. Similarly, Paul-Alain Beaulieu notes that the goddess's identification with Nanaya “was a basic tenet of Babylonian theology from very early times. There are very few hymns to Nanaya from the late periods which do not contain at least some trace of” (this identification) (Beaulieu 2003, 186–187). Beaulieu also mentions a possible identification of Nanaya with Urkittu in the *Nanaya Hymn of Assurbanipal* (SAA 3, 5), which “seems to equate her with Urkittu (i.e., Urkayītu)” (Beaulieu 2003, 187 and n. 56). See also, Erica Reiner's discussion of the first-millennium poem *Hymn of Nanā*, wherein the goddess proclaims for herself epithets associated with Ištar but then proclaims herself Nanaya (Reiner 1974, 221–236).

attention since the 1890s focuses on localized Ištars whose onomastic sequences include toponymic or adjectival epithets. Of interest for us are Ištar-of-Nineveh, Ištar-of-Arbela, along with a theonym derived from a toponym: Arbīlītu (“She of Arbela”), and Assyrian-Ištar, although in this final onomastic sequence “Assyrian” is an adjective instead of a toponym.⁴

From a broad mythic perspective, these identifications seem reasonable. After all, our popular take on Ištar’s character comprises an amalgam of Mesopotamian goddesses, but her personality remains relatively constant.⁵ Thus, consensus has long favored viewing the individualized divine names as part of a larger Ištar constellation.⁶ Various texts may depict an Ištar goddess with distinctive parents, consorts, or siblings, but her personality and her roles as goddess of love/lust and war remain stable.⁷ Moving beyond the composite, mythical stereotype, scholars are now less likely to identify Ištar with other non-Ištar-named Mesopotamian goddesses (e.g., Nanaya and Zarpānītu) than before, but they still identify Ištar with non-Ištar-named counterparts outside of Mesopotamia (e.g., Šaušga and Astarte).⁸ Likewise, scholars often identify localized goddesses whose identities include the theonym Ištar (e.g., Ištar-of-Nineveh, Ištar-of-Arbela, and the Assyrian-Ištar) as manifestations or representations of the singular mythic (henceforth: “unspecified”) Ištar.⁹

This essay explores the multiplicities surrounding the theonym Ištar, focusing primarily on the Neo-Assyrian period of the first millennium BCE. By privileging non-

4 Dashes between theonymic and toponymic elements (and “of”) indicate the elements serve as a singular divine name: e.g., Ištar-of-Nineveh = the goddess Ištar from Nineveh. Two parallel lines (//) are used to indicate that a theonymic element and a geographic epithet are acting together with the force of a singular divine name (e.g., Ištar//Lady-of-Nineveh = Ištar, the Lady from Nineveh). With reference to the cuneiform evidence, these parallel lines indicate that the first name is preceded by a divine determinative (^d), indicating divinity, but the epithet is not. When an epithet is preceded by a divine determinative, that epithet, typically “Lady” (*bēlet*) or “Queen” (*šarrat*), will instead be written out separately from any specific first name without the parallel lines. These epithet-toponym pairings follow the same rules of hyphenation as the theonymic-toponymic patterns. For example, “Ištar, Lady-of-Nineveh” represents two goddesses. The first is the mythic or unspecified Ištar, whereas the second is the esteemed goddesses of Nineveh. In contrast, “Ištar//Lady-of-Nineveh” represents one goddess.

5 Abusch 1999, 453.

6 For a discussion on Ištar, specifically, the cult objects, and localized manifestations that comprise the goddess’s divine constellation, see Hundley 2013, 88–107.

7 At Uruk, the unspecified Ištar is presented as the daughter of the high-god Anu (“Heaven”; Sumerian AN). Famously, in tablet VI of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Ištar demands that her father Anu release the Bull of Heaven against King Gilgamesh of Uruk because the king had rejected her marriage proposal (ll. 96–100). In contrast, Ištar is the daughter of the moon-god Sin (Sumerian NANNA) in the *Descent of Ištar*, wherein she challenges her sister Ereshkigal for control of the netherworld (ll. 16–20). In both the *Epic of Gilgamesh VI* and the *Descent of Ištar*, the goddess Ištar issues the same threat if she does not get what she wants: raise up the dead to eat the living.

8 See, for example, Wegner 1981; Beckman 1998, 1–10; and Meinhold 2009.

9 See, for example, Parpola 1997, XXIX; Lambert 2004, 35; Zsolnay 2009, 209; Sommer 2009, 14–15; cf. Allen 2015, 18–31.

theologically speculative texts (e.g., letters, royal inscriptions, and treaties) over speculative and esoteric compositions (e.g., god lists and syncretic hymns), the distinctiveness of three localized Iṣtar goddesses (*i.e.*, Iṣtar-of-Nineveh, Iṣtar-of-Arbela, and Assyrian-Iṣtar) is demonstrated. In *The Splintered Divine: A Study of Iṣtar, Baal, and Yahweh Divine Names and Divine Multiplicity in the Ancient Near East*, I suggested that each of these goddesses could be thought of as derived from a singular, unspecified Iṣtar in a sort of fragmentary process, which is why I chose the title *The Splintered Divine*. Here, I argue that each goddess's history began independently of the unspecified Iṣtar while (eventually) sharing the common theonym Iṣtar. Throughout Assyrian history, goddesses were brought into the Assyrian imperial sphere, took on the name Iṣtar, but retained their independence. We might think of this process as an incomplete assimilation that never finalized during the course of Assyrian history.¹⁰ The goddesses at Nineveh, Arbela, and Assur maintained their individuality, despite the presence of the unspecified Iṣtar throughout Mesopotamia because their distinctiveness better served the Neo-Assyrian imperial needs.

This incomplete-assimilation model for the Neo-Assyrian goddesses is likened then to the incomplete assimilation of the Aztec goddess Tonantzin with the Catholic Virgin of Guadalupe in the sixteenth century of the common era. Ultimately, Tonantzin and the Virgin of Guadalupe fully assimilate, under the pressure of the colonial acculturation and Catholic orthodoxy, but the process was far from complete in the century following Cortés' conquest of Tepeyac Hill in modern Mexico City.

1 Neo-Assyrian Iṣtars

In her discussion on the roles and actions of Mesopotamian goddesses, JoAnn Scurlock defines an "Iṣtar" in the Assyrian and Babylonian worlds as the goddess of a particular city, who is usually the daughter of the city's patron god.¹¹ This effectively renders the theonym Iṣtar equivalent to the English "goddess," and Scurlock reinforces this generic aspect of Iṣtar by listing several examples of Iṣtar-named goddesses and their corresponding mythological relationships: in Uruk, Iṣtar was the daughter of Anu; in Ḫarrān, Iṣtar was the daughter of Sin; and in Nippur, Iṣtar was the daughter of Enlil. Scurlock then refines this definition by adding that these goddesses were "spoiled brats and extremely dangerous."¹² Using this relationship-based identification methodology, a helpful proof-text comes from the lips of a very specific and famous Iṣtar,

¹⁰ Allen 2015, 141–199. Meinhold discusses localized assimilation, from which incomplete assimilation is partially derived (Meinhold 2009, 204–207).

¹¹ Scurlock 2009, 68.

¹² *Ibid.*

Ištar-of-Uruk. In the hymn, the *Self-Praise of Ištar*, the goddess identifies herself as the daughter of Anu (r. 4),¹³ indicating that this Ištar is best understood as Ištar-of-Uruk.

1.1 The Goddess at Nineveh

Like Ištar-of-Uruk, whose father was Anu, the Ninevite Ištar was Anu's daughter, so let us first consider the history of this Ninevite goddess. Gary Beckman notes that our earliest potential references to this deity may be from Šulgi's reign near the end of the third millennium BCE.¹⁴ Sumerian inscriptions from the Ur-III period identify a local goddess as "Shausha-of-Nineveh" (^dŠA.U₁₈(^{GIŠ}GAL).ŠA ⁷NI.NU.A.KAM, Schneider 79, ll. 6–7), which could either represent the divine name Šaušga or mean "the great/magnificent one" in the Hurrian language.¹⁵ Regardless of the meaning, we can reasonably suspect that Shausha-of-Nineveh was the same goddess who would be revered by the Hittites in the second millennium, Šaušga-of-Nineveh. We should keep in mind, however, that we must be careful identifying deities across centuries, given the paucity of our information. Even though a localized goddess in Nineveh is called a name that we associate with a similar goddess centuries later does not mean this text referred to her, be it Šaušga or Ištar.

Our next reference to a localized Ninevite goddess dates to Šamšī-Adad I's reign in the Old Babylonian period (ca. 1800 BCE), in which the king dedicates the rebuilt Emenue-temple to "Ištar in Nineveh" (^dINANNA *i-na ni-nu-wa-a*^{ki}, *RIMA* 1, 0.39.2 ii 10–11), a temple that he claims was built during the reign of Maništūšu (ca. 2250). About the same time, the prologue to Ḥammurapi's law collection (ca. 1750) refers to an Ištar in Nineveh, but this time the goddess is placed at the Emašmaš-temple (Laws of Ḥammurapi iv 59–63).¹⁶ We cannot know that these references to Ištar represent a continuity of reverence with the earlier Shausha that Šulgi mentioned, or even if Šulgi's Shausha had been previously identified with the goddess worshipped by Maništūšu. However, we can argue with confidence that the deity mentioned in each inscription should be regarded as *the* local goddess associated with the city.

We can imagine three scenarios by which to connect Shausha-of-Nineveh from Šulgi's reign with the Ištar in Nineveh during the eighteenth century. First, perhaps Shausha was recognized as Ištar by some or all the Ninevite ethnicities (e.g., Sumerian, Hurrian, Akkadian, Assyrian, or another group) in the Ur-III period; however, this group preferred to refer to her by her "magnificent" epithet, as reflected in our inscription. Second, perhaps no one recognized the deity as Ištar in Šulgi's day, but by the Old Babylonian period, she had been identified with or assimilated into the Akka-

¹³ Frank 1939, 37.

¹⁴ Beckman 1998, 1.

¹⁵ Wegner 1995, 117.

¹⁶ Roth 1997, 80.

dian goddess's cult. Finally, we should consider the possibility that these two goddesses were never identified with each other. That is, perhaps the cult of one goddess died out without ever attaching itself to the other.

Tentative as it may be, the second option is the most attractive. It seems a reasonable conclusion that the non-Assyrian Šaušga-of-Nineveh was eventually assimilated into the larger Ištar orthodoxy of the Assyrian world. Her personality and function were intentionally left distinct from other Assyrian and Babylonian goddesses because these empires benefitted from her independence, highlighting the regional importance of the city.¹⁷ This Šaušga- or Ištar-of-Nineveh was never fully identified with the unspecified Ištar, whom scholars typically consider the Ištar from Uruk. Moreover, there seems to have been some special aspect about the original goddess in Nineveh that the local Ninevites were not prepared to lose and that the scholarscribes were content preserving. Scurlock and Beckman both suggest this special aspect might have been the Ninevite goddess's reputation as a healer or patroness of magic, which may further reflect a Hurrian or Hittite background rather than a Sumerian or Akkadian background for this goddess.¹⁸

Whatever the relationship, or lack of the relationship, between the Ištar(s) revered by Šulgi, Šamši-Adad, and Ḫammurapi, the divine name Ištar-of-Nineveh appears in a Hurrian god list from Ugarit (^dINANNA *ni-na₂-a^{ki}*, *Ugaritica* V, 220–221, no. 149a). This attestation further stresses the importance of this localized goddess in Hurrian theology in the second half of the second millennium. Her importance is also highlighted in the fourteenth-century letter that Tušratta, the king of Mitanni, sent to Egypt, along with a cult statue of the Ninevite goddess: “Thus Šaušga-of-Nineveh//Mistress-of-all-Lands: ‘I wish to go to Egypt . . .’ Now I herewith send her, and she is on her way” (EA 23:13–18, William Moran's translation, modified slightly).¹⁹ Tušratta not only sent blessings to Egypt on behalf of Šaušga-of-Nineveh, he sent the goddess herself, even ending his message by encouraging the pharaoh to worship Šaušga-of-Nineveh while she was physically there (l. 31). Šaušga-of-Nineveh was an important goddess in official Mitanni tradition, but her geographic ties to Nineveh remained vital to her identity, even as she momentarily resided in Egypt.

We may not know the ethnicity of the people who first worshipped her in Nineveh or when they began worshipping her, but her intermediate history as a Hurrian and Hittite goddess is reflected in an eighth-century inscription, wherein Assyrian king Sargon II referred to her as Šaušga//Who-Resides-(in)-Nineveh (^dša-uš-ka a¹-ši-bat *ni-nu-wa*, Lyon 1883, 9:54). Another remnant of the Ninevite goddess's Hurrian/Hittite legacy is her mid- or low-level position in the pantheon. In Hittite tradition, Ištar-of-Nineveh was a subordinate of the chief deity's consort; in Neo-Assyrian times, her rel-

¹⁷ Cf. Allen 2015, 107–108.

¹⁸ Beckman 1998, 6–7; Scurlock 2009, 68.

¹⁹ Moran 1992, 61–62. See also EA 21 and 24 §8 for other occurrences of the divine name Šaušga in the Amarna Letters.

actively low status in the Neo-Assyrian pantheon is demonstrated in numerous texts wherein the goddess's name appears near the end of the listed gods and after the Assyrian chief deity's consort Mullissu.²⁰ Consider, for example, a royal inscription from the reign of the seventh-century Assyrian King Esarhaddon (*RINAP* 4, Esar. 1 ii 45–46). This text mentions six theonyms in sequence: Assur, Šamaš, Bēl, Nabû, Ištar-of-Nineveh, and Ištar-of-Arbela. Of these six names, the first four represent male gods, and the final two represent goddesses. The first name, Assur, is the empire's chief deity, Šamaš is the sun-god/god of justice, Bēl is a title for Marduk, the chief deity of Babylon, and Nabû is Marduk's son. This sequence is relatively stable throughout Neo-Assyrian lists of theonyms, be it in royal inscriptions, witness lists, personal and royal correspondence, or cultic texts.²¹ Only after these male deities are listed do the names Ištar-of-Nineveh and Ištar-of-Arbela appear. This late inclusion in the list of theonyms is not unusual for these two goddesses. Indeed, the theonyms Ištar-of-Nineveh and Ištar-of-Arbela (or some variation on the two toponyms) can be found in several texts, including in letters 9, 10, 12, 15, 56, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 140, and 156 collected in the *State Archives of Assyria* (SAA) 13; in letters 1, 33, 49, 59, 60, 61, and 128 collected in SAA 16; in letters 82, 83, 130, 174, 227, 228, 245, 249, 252, 286, 293, and 294 collected in SAA 10; in Assyrian treaties SAA 2, 2 and SAA 2, 6; in the cultic text *BM* 121206 ix; and in Esarhaddon's royal inscriptions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 33, 48, 70, 71, 77, 78, 79, 93 in the collection *RINAP* 4.²² To sum up, when Ištar-of-Nineveh (or Ištar-of-Nineveh and Ištar-of-Arbela together) appears in a Neo-Assyrian list of theonyms, she typically appears near the end of the list, after the major deities and their consorts.²³ Indeed, this goddess's name appears distinct from the unspecified Ištar in esoteric and mystical texts, such as “Marduk Ordeal (Assur Version),” which mentions Ištar (^dIŠ.TAR) separately from Ištar-of-Nineveh and Ištar-of-Arbela (^d15 ša NINA^{ki} ^d15 ša ^{urru}arba-il₃; SAA 3, 34, ll. 72–73; cf. SAA 2, 6:453–460). All of this suggests that the goddess at Nineveh was less important than the fact that she was the goddess *from* Nineveh, a city that served as the Assyrian capital for a century.

The pre-Neo-Assyrian history of Ištar-of-Nineveh might be sparsely documented, but we can still trace the history of a Ninevite goddess, whom conquering kings would identify specifically as Ištar-of-Nineveh. Potential antecedents of the goddess appeared sometime in the mid-third millennium and probably continued through the Old Akkadian, the Ur III, the Old Babylonian and Assyrian, the Hurrian Age of the Mitanni Empire, the Middle Hittite Kingdom, and Middle Babylonian periods, and we can connect these to her Neo-Assyrian history, where her divine name frequently appears. Although she was not originally identified as Ištar, this mid- to low-level god-

²⁰ Cf. Allen 2015, 100–110, for a full methodological explanation of why late serial position in god lists indicates low status.

²¹ Cf. Allen 2015, 372–383, where lists of theonyms are shown from multiple Neo-Assyrian texts.

²² For further data, see Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.10, 3.11, 3.14, 3.15, and 3.16 in Allen 2015, 370–383.

²³ Barré 1983, 19 and 25–26; Allen 2015, 104.

dess was regularly contrasted with other goddesses named Ištar, as well as the unspecified high goddess Ištar.

1.2 The Goddess at Arbela

Before we begin our survey of the divine name Ištar as it relates to the city of Arbela, we should reconsider the preceding paragraph wherein the Arbelite goddess is frequently paired with the Ninevite goddess near the end of lists of divine names. Specifically, it is worth noting that the Arbelite goddess consistently appears after the Ninevite goddess, indicating her lesser status compared to the former.

The history of the Arbelite goddess is less well known than the one in Nineveh. According to Brigitte Menzel, among the earliest attestations we have recovered of a local goddess in Arbela, the epithet Lady-of-Arbela (GAŠAN *arba-il*₃) has been uncovered at Nuzi in a fourteenth-century Babylonian ritual text. Working on the assumption that Hurrian theological influences affected Assyrian theology, Menzel considers it reasonable to conclude that “Lady of Arbela” was a localized Ištar/Šaušga goddess who later became known as Ištar-of-Arbela.²⁴ A century later at Nuzi, a Šalmaneser I text boasted that he rebuilt the Egašan-kalam-ma of Ištar//Lady-of-Arbela (*RIMA* 1, A.O.77.16 iii 11’–12’), and he boasted building a cult center for Ištar//Lady-of-Talmuššu (l. 9’). Although we cannot know with certainty if the Lady-of-Arbela at Nuzi and Šalmaneser I’s Ištar//Lady-of-Arbela were identified with each other in the fourteenth century, Menzel thinks a reasonable conclusion is that these two inscriptions refer to the same deity: Ištar-of-Arbela.

Because of Arbela’s strategic position at the western edge of the Zagros Mountains, the Arbelite goddess became increasingly important as the Assyrian Empire expanded.²⁵ The Milqia shrine that was built just outside of Arbela for the occasional *Akītu*-festival reflects this goddess’s growing importance. After describing his successful mid-ninth-century campaign against Urartu, Šalmaneser III mentioned that he performed the *Akītu*-festival for the Arbelite goddess in the Milqia shrine (*SAA* 3, 17 r. 27–30), referring to her first as Lady-of-Arbela (r. 28) and Ištar (r. 30). Elsewhere, when Šalmaneser III invokes the name Ištar in his royal inscriptions, he does not qualify her name with a toponymic epithet (see *RIMA* 3, A.O.102.2, 6, 10, and 14), which makes it difficult to determine whether the Arbelite goddess had been identified with or considered distinct from the unspecified Ištar, especially because we lack an intentional contrast between Ištar and the Arbelite goddess in this text.²⁶

²⁴ Menzel 1981, 6 and n. 20.

²⁵ Pongratz-Leisten 1994, 79.

²⁶ Lady-of-Nineveh appears in line 2 of this text, but the nature of the relationship between the Arbelite and Ninevite goddesses and the unspecified Ištar is unclear.

By the eighth century, the Arbelite goddess was clearly contrasted with Ištar-of-Nineveh (see above). Her name appears after the Ninevite goddess in the divine witness list within the treaty between Assur-nērārī V and Matī'ilu of Arpad (SAA 2, 2 vi 15–16). Moreover, she was identified in writing in the inscriptions associated with the famous eighth-century Tel-Barsip relief in northern Syria.²⁷ Not only is this relief explicitly connected to this geographically specific goddess, but aspects of her divine personality are very present, even if they all fit the traditional personality of unspecified Ištar. This Arbelite goddess appears warlike in the relief: she stands on a lion, holds its leash, and is armed with a sword, globe-tipped bow-cases, and a shield.

In the seventh century, the Arbelite goddess was well known as Ištar-of-Arbela, an imperial warrior goddess. Throughout this century, this goddess was distinguished from the Ninevite goddess and several other goddesses. If there was something special about the Ninevite goddess that made her distinctiveness worth preserving (*i.e.*, her healing powers or merely her geography), then we might expect that the Arbelite goddess also had special qualities worth distinguishing her from the Ninevite goddess and other Ištars. If so, then the Arbelite goddess's reputation as a warrior goddess was matched by her importance as a conduit for prophecy (see SAA 9, 1.4, 1.6, 2.4, 5, 6, 7 and 9).

Another aspect of the Arbelite goddess that catches our attention and may hint at the goddess's origins is the preservation of her alterative name Urbilītu/Arbilītu ("the Arbelitess"), a feminine noun derived from the city name Arbela. Both the Ninevite and Arbelite goddesses have reputations as healers; however, in an examination of diagnostic medical texts, Scurlock notes that this goddess is specifically not referred to as Ištar-of-Arbela. Instead, she is identified simply as "the Arbelitess" (*ur₂-bi-li-ti*, DPS III A 15–16), completely lacking an obvious theonymic element. Every other reference to any Ištar (or generic *ištar*) in these medical texts uses the name Ištar, but when a deity is blamed for Strachan's Syndrome, a vitamin B deficiency, the theonym Ištar is avoided for Arbilītu.²⁸ This unique treatment may indicate that this goddess established herself as her own distinct personality, at least as far as the compiler of the Diagnostic and Prognostic Series was concerned. Possibly, this non-Ištar name was a holdover from before the local Arbelite goddess was identified with Ištar. Maybe her name was originally Arbilītu; after all, naming a deity after its associated city has an Assyrian precedent with the god Assur in the city/hill Assur. Indeed, the topographic element Arbela is consistently the most important element in this goddess's name when we consider her relatively brief second-millennium history and her robust first-millennium Neo-Assyrian history uncovered from administrative documents and esoteric texts.

²⁷ Dalley 2007, 51.

²⁸ Scurlock/Andersen 2005, 159 and 708 n. 19.

Moreover, this toponymic element plays a role in Neo-Assyrian onomastics. In the *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*,²⁹ no less than seven personal names invoke the Arbelite goddess by focusing on the city. A name like Arbail-lāmur (“May I see [Ištar-of-]Arbela!” VAT 20341 A 6’) could refer to the city itself,³⁰ but other personal names make more sense when the theophoric element is interpreted as a reference to the goddess rather than to the city: Arbailītu-bēltūni (“The [divine] one from Arbela is our Lady,” *Iraq* 41, 56, iii 24), Arbail-ḥammāt (“[Ištar-of-]Arbela is the mistress,” VS 1, 96:2, r. 3, and 5), Arbail-Ilāni (“[Ištar-of-]Arbela is my god,” SAAB 9, 74, iii 12), Arbail-Šarrat (“[Ištar-of-]Arbela is Queen,” ADD 207:4 and l.e. 1), and Arbail-šumu-iddina (“[Ištar-of-]Arbela has given a name,” ND 3466b r. 2). In each of these Neo-Assyrian personal names, the toponymic element is more important than the name Ištar. Of course, we cannot know if any of the myriad of the Neo-Assyrian personal names with an Ištar element refer to the Arbelite goddess as opposed to any other localized Ištar, but the point is that we should focus on the irregular or less-common identifier Arbailītu as a clue to a unique origin for the goddess later known as Ištar-of-Arbela. Perhaps the name Arbailītu is evidence of an incomplete assimilation in ancient Mesopotamia between a local goddess from Arbela and the unspecified Ištar. Yes, the Arbelite goddess was identified with Ištar already in the fourteenth century, and she is commonly known as Ištar-of-Arbela throughout the eighth and seventh centuries. Rather than assuming the Arbelite goddess separated, or splintered, away from the unspecified Ištar over the course of seven centuries, we might consider that this goddess was an independent and distinct goddess who was later identified with the name Ištar (or the generic form *ištar*), but remained semi-autonomous and independent from the unspecified namesake. Were this the case, her incomplete assimilation was likely a result of her city’s importance on the eastern frontier.

1.3 The Goddess Who was Assyrian

Ištar-of-Nineveh was occasionally identified with the Assyrian chief deity Assur’s consort Mullissu by some in the final century of the Assyrian Empire, and Ištar-of-Arbela was rarely identified with Mullissu (if at all), but nothing indicates that Assyrian-Ištar (^d15 *aš-šu-ri-tu*) was ever identified with Mullissu. This is despite the fact that she resided near the god Assur in his capital for hundreds of years.³¹ Notably, the theonym Assyrian-Ištar is grammatically different from Ištar-of-Nineveh and Ištar-of-Arbela because the word *aššurītu*, which follows the theonym, is a feminine adjective rather than a toponym.

²⁹ PNA 1, 1–3, 1.

³⁰ Fales/Jakob-Rost 1991, 70.

³¹ Meinhold 2009, 206–207 and 190–191. For a fuller discussion of Assyrian-Ištar, see *ibid.*, 51–64.

The Assyrian goddess's name first appears on two votive offerings from the reign of Sargon I of Assur (ca. 1920–1881) and later in a treaty between the king of Apum Till-Abnû and the city of Assur.³² The treaty (ca. 1750) contains an oath by which the two parties swore by Assyrian-Ištar ([^deš₄]-tar₂ a-šu-ri-tam, Eidem *Fs. Garelli* 195 i 11), Lady-of-Apu, Lady-of-Nineveh ([^d]be-[l]a-at ni-nu-wa, 1. 13), Ninkarrak, and Išhara. This indicates that Assyrian-Ištar was treated as a goddess distinct from the Ninevite Ištar already in the early second millennium.³³ This distinction between Assyrian-Ištar and other Ištar goddesses continues into the Middle Assyrian period, as evidenced by offering lists from Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. In *MARV* 4 95, this king made an offering to her as Assyrian-Ištar (^diš₈-tar₂ aš₂-šu-re-ti, i 9'), contrasted her with Ištar-of-Heaven (^diš₈-tar₂ ša AN-e', i. 10'), and then summarized the offerings "to the gods" (a-na DINGIR^{meš}-ni, l. 11') "and the goddesses/Ištars" (u₃ ^dINANNA^{meš}, l. 12').³⁴

In the first millennium, Assyrian-Ištar's role diminished compared to the goddesses of Nineveh and Arbela, as indicated by their priority before her in god lists (e.g., *SAA* 2, 3:7–10' and r. 2'–5'), but Assyrian-Ištar did regularly appear as a witness in land grants and other lower-level administration documents.³⁵ This demotion is partially the result of the movement of the imperial capital away from Assur and, eventually, to Nineveh. Despite this shift away from the city of Assur and Assyrian-Ištar's correspondingly reduced importance, the goddess continued to play a role in the cult at Assur. This continued role is demonstrated by the ritual text *BM* 121206 from Sennacherib's reign. According to this text, Mullissu's statue was placed next to the Assur statue (ix 27'), whereas Assyrian-Ištar's statue was placed alongside the goddesses of Nineveh and Arbela (xi 30'–31').

Throughout her history, the Assyrian-Ištar was considered distinct from the Ninevite and Arbelite goddesses, as well as other goddesses identified by the theonym Ištar (e.g., Ištar-of-Heaven). Despite her long history at the Assyrian capital, this goddess was never identified as the chief deity's consort, and significantly her role within the Assyrian pantheon diminished as the capital moved from Assur to Nineveh.

³² *Ibid.*, 52 and n. 205–206.

³³ *Ibid.*, 53; and Eidem 1991, 195. The earliest invocation of the goddess Assyrian-Ištar as such in a royal inscription does not appear until Puzur-Assur III's reign in the early fifteenth century, in which the theonym is linked with Ilu-šumma's temple (³E₂ ^dINANNA ⁶aš-šu-ri-tim ša DINGIR-šum-ma ⁷ru-ba-u₂ e-pu-šu, "temple of Assyrian-Ištar, which Ilu-šumma the prince built," *RIMA* 1 A.0.61.2:5–7).

³⁴ For a fuller discussion of second-millennium offerings received by the Assyrian-Ištar, see Allen 2015, 189 n. 134.

³⁵ Meinhold 2009, 58–59.

2 Madonna: Our Lady of Guadalupe

Having considered the history and development of the three Assyrian goddesses at Nineveh, Arbela, and Assur, we may now move across the world and look more than two thousand years ahead. These may seem like vast distances in space and time, but commonalities exist. Localized goddesses with obscure origins and histories continue to receive veneration in the face of assimilation when it benefits imperial power. In Nineveh, Arbela, and Assur, the importance of these cities provided sufficient reason to maintain the goddesses' independence, so only an incomplete assimilation between the goddesses and the unspecified Ištar occurred. In Mexico City, the initial incomplete assimilation between the goddess Tonantzin and the Virgin of Guadalupe provided the needed religious and cultural ambiguity for the indigenous people to hold on to their own language and beliefs as they accultured to Spanish Catholicism. Unlike our Assyrian examples, however, maintaining an incomplete assimilation did not serve Spain's long-term purpose, so the assimilation was finalized: Tonantzin became Our Lady of Guadalupe. To reiterate, the current comparison between the three Assyrian goddesses and Tonantzin who is Our Lady of Guadalupe is done for the sake of the entity's incorporation into a larger geopolitical purpose, not a discussion of Our Lady's multiplicity or unity.³⁶

According to tradition, 57-year-old Juan Diego encountered an apparition of the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe four times from December 9 through 12 in 1531 on Tepeyac Hill, just north of Mexico City, a decade after the Aztec capital Tenochtitla fell to Cortés.³⁷ She identified herself in the newly Christianized Juan Diego's native language Nahuatl.³⁸ The official, Roman Catholic interpretation of these apparitions is that the singular Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, appeared to Juan Diego. She asked him to find Archbishop Juan de Zumárraga of Mexico so that a church could be built in her honor at Tepeyac Hill, whence she could oversee and protect the native people.³⁹ Juan Diego twice failed to get the archbishop to act, so the apparition gave him a cloak and told him to pick roses where they should not be expected to grow. The cloak, which suddenly bore the Virgin's image, and the roses finally inspired the archbishop to act on December 12, and the Marian shrine was commissioned.⁴⁰ As a result

³⁶ For a fuller discussion on the perceived multiplicity of madonnine statutes in lay and orthodox Catholic thought, see Allen 2015, 59–70. This madonnine analogy has been incorporated into the Ištar-goddesses discussion because of anecdotal arguments previously advanced by Otto Eißfeldt 1963, 176, and H. S. Versnel 2011, 66 (cf. Banfield 1958, 131; and Porter 2004, 44 n. 16). As I argue elsewhere, the madonnine anecdote offered by Versnel, like Banfield and Porter before him, is worth considering, whereas Eißfeldt's quick reference to madonnine and Yahwistic multiplicity is less convincing (cf. Allen 2015, 300–301).

³⁷ Peterson 2005, 571; and Taylor 1987, 9.

³⁸ Peterson 1992, 39.

³⁹ Wolf 1958, 34 n. 8; and Stoichita 1994, 40.

⁴⁰ Wolf 1958, 35.

of the Church's official response to the apparitions, especially the work of Miguel Sánchez in 1648, Tepeyac Hill is now the site of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe (with a capacity for 50,000 visitors) and the World Peace Rose Garden.⁴¹ However, despite the now canonical status of the madonnine tradition in Mexico City, Tepeyac Hill once hosted a preconquest cult site, purportedly in honor of the goddess Tonantzin, which was slowly assimilated into the colonial and Catholic Church. This period of slow assimilation parallels the incomplete assimilation of the various Iṣṭars from the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

Unfortunately, a full history of the transition of Tepeyac Hill from Aztec polytheistic cult site to Spanish Catholic basilica is impossible to recount, in part, because our first textual witness to the purported event is from 1648, more than 100 years after the alleged apparitions.⁴² In addition to time, several other factors complicate our understanding of the process, including that over ninety percent of Aztec religious sites were left in ruin in the wake of Cortés's arrival and that the Spanish made a point to place Marian statues on Aztec altars, intentionally obscuring indigenous devotion.⁴³ This is all compounded by the fact that most relevant Nahuatl documents were destroyed and what information that has been preserved comes to us through the biases of colonial and Christian writers.⁴⁴ According to Jeanette Peterson, while there is evidence of preconquest cult activity in the general area of Tepeyac Hill, historians can be hesitant to attribute indigenous religious influences on the Catholic shrine.⁴⁵ As William Taylor notes, more research must be done on Tepeyac's cult origins as we sift the relationship between the Aztec cult and the Catholic basilica.⁴⁶ There are simply too many holes in our knowledge base to rebuild the transition with confidence, but it is this transition that enlightens our understanding of the incomplete assimilation of Iṣṭars.

Although we lack specifics about the cult in the region surrounding Tepeyac Hill during the preconquest era, we know that worship there could include rain-dancing ceremonies and effigies representing the divine.⁴⁷ Moreover, Peterson notes that the

41 International World Peace Rose Gardens, "Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe World Peace Rose Garden," accessed December 8, 2021, <https://www.worldpeacerosegardens.org/the-basilica-of-our-lady-of-guadalupe/>; and Wood 2020, 210.

42 Stoichita 1994, 42. Stoichita notes that already in 1600, commercialized prints of the Virgin were in circulation.

43 Wood 2020, 210; Taylor 1987, 10; and Peterson 1992, 39.

44 Lara 2008, 102. Regarding *Nican Mophua* ("Here is Recounted"), the supposed 16th-century Nahuatl text attributed to Antonio Valeriano, a native scribe, scholars are divided over its authenticity (cf. Peterson 1992, 47 n. 3; *contra* Léon-Portilla 2017, 76).

45 Peterson 2014, 71.

46 Taylor 1987, 25.

47 Peterson 2014, 79. Peterson also notes that the site has pre-Aztec influences in both political and sacred traditions (72).

Tepeyac area served as an ancient pilgrimage site devoted to chthonic deities.⁴⁸ Indeed, pencil-and-ink sketches, including the *Códice de Teotenantzin*, and archaeological surveys direct us to two petroglyphs portraying a preconquest goddess.⁴⁹ The connection between a preconquest goddess and the shrine at Tepeyac Hill is reinforced by accounts of the works of Nezahualcoytl, ruler of Texcoco, whose building projects included a statue with the shield of Tonantzin Cihuacoatl, “Our Honorable Mother, the Snake Woman.”⁵⁰

The name Tonantzin Cihuacoatl is of particular interest when considering the origins of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Admittedly, we have no evidence of a specific goddess known as Tonantzin from the preconquest era. Rather, *tonan* (“our Mother”) is a title that could be applied to various birth goddesses, and *tzin* is an honorific suffix.⁵¹ As an epithet, the motherhood language underlying Tonantzin conveniently fits the Catholic epithet for Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mary, the mother of God. From an Aztec perspective, Tonantzin is too generic to invoke a singular goddess, but this non-specificity is probably what made the transition of Tepeyac Hill from Aztec shrine to Catholic basilica possible.⁵² Following the Christian witnesses from the 16th century, the indigenous people could view it as a continuation of their native tradition, a tradition in which the gods often lacked an “absolute individuality” as they “changed attributes and names.”⁵³ Yes, Mary, Mother of God, is a specific entity in Catholic tradition, but according to various contemporary Spanish critics (see below), the indigenous people avoided Catholic specificity and continued to revere the entity at Tepeyac Hill as Tonantzin, Our Honored Mother instead. As the native people acculturated into Spanish Catholicism, generic epithets may have aided religious syncretism, allowing for a complete assimilation between the two at a later date. Forced to rely on the Spanish interpretation rather than the indigenous experience, we must remember that honorific titles and common names obscure our understanding of the entity’s nature (from the worshipper’s perspective), complicating any conclusions we might draw.

The second element of Nezahualcoytl’s goddess’s epithet, Cihuacoatl, is interesting and coincidental in its own right, especially as it relates to snakes. To fully appreciate this epithet, we must first address the Spanish word *Guadalupe*. Notably, the phonemes “g” and “d” are not native to the Nahuatl language.⁵⁴ This means the apparition would not have identified herself to Juan Diego in his native Nahuatl language as Guadalupe; instead, Guadalupe (famously known as the hometown of the Black Madonna

48 Peterson 1992, 39.

49 Luján/Noguez 2011, 94; and Peterson 2014, 73.

50 Barcas 2017, 80 and 82.

51 Peterson 2014, 87.

52 *Ibid.*, 101. Peterson describes the preconquest religious traditions at Tepeyac Hill as “fluid” and “polymorphic,” so this generic appellation is all the more appropriate.

53 *Ibid.*, 82.

54 Soormally 2015, 177 n. 4.

in Extremadura since 1340) must have been added to the narrative later. The best efforts to attribute the word Guadalupe to Juan Diego's apparition match it up with Ne-zahualcoytl's Cihuacoatl, "the Snake Woman." For example, Francis Parkinson Keyes argued that the Nahuatl word for snake/serpent was *coatl*; the word for goddess was *tlaloc*; and the word for watching over was *tlalpia*.⁵⁵ Together these became *Caotalocpia* (allowing for the drop of one of the two clusters *tla*), which resembles the Spanish *Guadalupe*. Because the Virgin is often depicted as standing on a snake in Catholic imagery,⁵⁶ Keyes concluded that the Aztec snake goddess – although not specifically Ne-zahualcoytl's Tonantzin Cihuacoatl – lent herself to identification with Our Lady of Guadalupe. Historically, then, we may posit that a Spanish priest heard the Nahuatl word *Caotalocpia*, considered it a linguistic approximation for *Guadalupe*, and built the identification between the Aztec goddess and the Catholic apparition.

Again, the preconquest history of Tepeyac Hill and local reverence to a Tonantzin goddess is difficult to reconstruct, and we are unable to isolate a specific goddess with which to identify Tonantzin. However, we need not reconstruct any formal history or theological reality to argue for an incomplete assimilation between a goddess and the Virgin. Nor need we accept the historical reality of a Juan Diego, much less his visions and miracles behind the founding of the Catholic shrine itself in his day.⁵⁷ Rather, our best evidence regarding the pre-history of a cult at this site is found in contemporary Spanish criticisms of indigenous worship practices. In these criticisms we find evidence of continuity between a native religious tradition and canonical Catholic reverence of Our Lady of Guadalupe. For example, in 1555, the first Mexican Church council had problems with "paganism" and the "Indian response to domination" regarding "the persistence of traditional religious beliefs."⁵⁸ The Church stepped up its evangelical efforts and relied, in part, upon syncretism between Catholicism and indigenous religion and upon associations with healing disease, fertility, and natural disasters common to the popular view of the Virgin and perceptions of native goddesses.

The establishment of a Catholic shrine in 1556 at Tepeyac Hill was part of these increased efforts to attract the native population to Catholicism.⁵⁹ These efforts must have been effective because already in 1556, Franciscan friar Francisco de Bustamante lamented "the people of the city" and their improper devotion at Tepeyac Hill; however, by 1557, Archbishop Montúfor resided as patron of the shrine, highlighting the evangeli-

⁵⁵ Viz. Wood 2020, 211.

⁵⁶ Cf. Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12:17 for biblical interest in the conflict between woman/virgin and serpents/dragons. For connections between Our Lady of Guadalupe and the book of Revelation, see Stoichita 1994, 43; and Peterson 2014, 120.

⁵⁷ Peterson suggests that there was no Catholic shrine at Tepeyac Hill prior to 1555 (Peterson 1992, 40); The Juan Diego narrative was already challenged as fable in 1779 by Juan Baustista Muñoz (Stoichita 1994, 42).

⁵⁸ Peterson 1992, 40.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

cal efforts undertaken while catholicizing New Spain.⁶⁰ Viewing these evangelical efforts and laments as two sides of the same coin, we can imagine how the Spanish wanted to create coreligionists while remaining distinct from the non-European populations. Indeed, regardless of the expression and practice of the native population, the Spanish might not have trusted their Catholicism precisely because it was forced upon them.⁶¹ Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún's words should be evaluated in this vein. He bore witness to native people's pilgrimages to Tepeyac Hill approximately half a century after Cortés' conquest, noting that they were still worshiping the ancient goddess:

The Spaniards call it Tepeaquilla; now it is called Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. At this place they had a temple dedicated to the mother of the gods whom they called Tonantzin, which means Our Mother. There they performed many sacrifices in honor of this goddess. (Bernardino de Sahagún, Florentine Codex).⁶²

Sahagún further commented that pilgrims came from all over Mexico, bringing offerings with them. These native pilgrims and their performance of inappropriate rites at the Catholic shrine were not the end of Sahagún's concerns; he was further troubled by the goddess's name and the confusion it supposedly inspired. The similarities between the meaning of Tonantzin, "Our Honored Mother," and the Virgin's epithet, "Mother of God," created an intolerable ambiguity for Sahagún.⁶³ Not only did he blame the indigenous population for this syncretism that kept their native tradition alive within Catholic practice, he blamed priests for highlighting similarities between the goddess and the Virgin: "And now that a church of Our Lady of Guadalupe is built there, they also call her Tonantzin, being motivated by the preachers who called Our Lady, the Mother of God, Tonantzin."⁶⁴ Although religious ambiguity and the Spanish usurpation of sacred spaces enabled the missionaries to spread Catholicism throughout the region, Sahagún dismissed this religious syncretism as a Satanic invention.⁶⁵

Moving into the seventeenth century, the relationship between Tonantzin and the Virgin blurs to the point that Tonantzin's indigenous legacy is being lost. Yes, Jacinto de la Serna echoed Bustamante's and Sahagún's complaint that "it is the purpose of the wicked to [worship] the goddess and not the Most Holy Virgin, or both together," but in 1648 Miguel Sánchez led the campaign to legitimate Tepeyac Hill in Catholic

⁶⁰ Taylor 1987, 11.

⁶¹ See, for example, Henry Kamen's comment regarding the Spanish Inquisition, "Given the forced nature of the mass conversions of 1391, it was obvious that many could not have been genuine Christians" (Kamen 2014, 16).

⁶² Viz. Peterson 2014, 69.

⁶³ Peterson 2014, 81.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

eyes.⁶⁶ His *Imagen de la Virgen María Madre de Dios de Guadalupe milagrosamente Aparecida en México, celebrada en su historia con la profecía del capítulo doze del Apocalipsis* was the first text to establish Tepeyac Hill as the location of Juan Diego's visions; maintain Juan Diego was himself a Christian convert who spoke Nahuatl; and indicate that the apparition identified herself as Guadalupe. Although he wrote more than a century after the supposed events, Sánchez's efforts greatly assisted the transition of Tepeyac Hill from a Catholic shrine into a canonical, Mexican church (and later basilica). Through his record of the 1531 events, Sánchez provided a native hero that the indigenous population could embrace, and he allowed them to reimagine the Spanish conquest beyond political or imperial terms. Sánchez confirmed that the Virgin wanted to establish a presence and care for her people in this land, and over time his narrative won out. Because he wrote nearly 130 years after Cortés, his audience had been Christianized for several generations. Aspects of their preconquest cultures surely remained, and local practices would continue to remain distinct from Spanish culture, but Spanish acculturation had plenty of time to redefine the people so that the shrine need be only Christian.

Sánchez built upon the syncretistic reality that Sahagún and other Spanish writers condemned. Because of their bias against the native paganism, Europeans necessarily dismissed native traditions as they sought to convert them to Catholicism, and at the same time, they did not trust those conversions.⁶⁷ Even into the late-eighteenth century, the European elite wanted to remain distinct from the native peoples despite the inescapable fact that they were now coreligionists. Thus, Martín de León's claim that the native population revered Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac Hill, but really "many of them understand this in the old way (*i.e.*, their Tonantzin) and not in the modern way (*i.e.*, our Virgin)."⁶⁸ De León may have parroted Sahagún and others from the previous centuries, but in the wake of Sánchez, the *Imagen de la Virgen*, and three centuries of colonization, the identities of Tonantzin and the Virgin had fused in the popular, that is, Catholic mind. Specific aspects of preconquest culture survived to color religious practice, like the nondescript Nahuatl name/epithet Tonantzin, but the population at Tepeyac Hill, throughout Mexico, and all over the Americas fully recognize "our Mother" as the canonical Our Lady of Guadalupe and not as a preconquest goddess. Whatever incomplete assimilation may have existed in the 16th century, Sánchez and others' retelling of the Juan Diego narrative helped complete the assimilation that we bear witness to today in Mexico City.

Although the Church's official position is to downplay Marian or madonnine apparitions, there is no denying that establishing a local madonnine shrine benefits the local economy and the relative political power of the clergy within the Church hierar-

⁶⁶ Wolf 1958, 35 and 39 n. 11; and Peterson 1992, 40.

⁶⁷ Burkhart 1998, 365.

⁶⁸ *Viz.* Wolf 1958, 35 and 39 n. 11.

chy.⁶⁹ As Michael P. Carroll notes, madonnine shrines can only survive with official Church encouragement and support.⁷⁰ In this regard, the publication of Juan Diego's vision ultimately allowed for the incorporation of a forbidden religious community (*i.e.*, the pilgrimage cult to the mother goddess Tonantzin) into the larger, official cult that is the Our Lady of Guadalupe cult at Tepeyac Hill and further elevated the importance of this same site. In addition to winning over the native population to Christianity, this Catholic basilica has brought untold prestige and wealth to the church in Mexico City, benefitting both the local community and the larger Church, as it has become a symbol of Latin American and Catholic pride across the globe.

3 Conclusion

My argument for distinctiveness of the Ninevite goddess, Ištar-of-Nineveh, the Arbelite goddess, Ištar-of-Arbela, and the Assyrian goddess, Assyrian-Ištar, from each other and other Ištar-named goddesses, including the unspecified Ištar has not changed; they should still be considered distinct. I want to reconsider the nature of their relationship to the unspecified Ištar as one of incomplete assimilation, not divine splintering. I offer the madonnine analogy from Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac Hill because many Assyriologists and Classicists have turned to the Virgin Mary as an example of orthodox singularity despite her numerous localized manifestations. The example from Tepeyac Hill does not provide insight into modern madonnine multiplicity, but it does provide access to a window of assimilation, one that was once incomplete for a time. We can, I suggest, reconsider our data for the goddesses at Nineveh, Arbela, and Assur through an incomplete assimilative model in light of these processes at Tepeyac Hill. Instead of assuming that those three goddesses originated as Ištar and then splintered away to become their own goddesses with their own onomastic sequences, we should reexamine their independent localized histories and stake a claim on their original (and continued) independence and distinctiveness.

Reconsidering these data would not only privilege the literal meaning of these ancient documents, especially those that appear to differentiate between localized Ištars, but it would provide another layer of religious understanding to those local populations and their goddesses. The perspective offered by an incomplete assimilation model could also offer further insight into the relationship between local cults and their populations and the imperial Assyrian system, or the relationship across various populations. For example, Meinhold explores the possibility of an incomplete assimi-

⁶⁹ Cf. Carroll 1985, 56–74; and Allen 2015, 59–70.

⁷⁰ Carroll 1992, 164. Consider also the madonnine shrines at Lourdes and LaSalette, whose existence has depended upon official church recognition and support, which, in turn, booster the local economy and parish politics.

lation between two localized goddesses and the imperial god's Assur's consort, Mullissu in her larger examination of Neo-Assyrian Ištar's. Specifically, she argues that Ištar-of-Nineveh was increasingly recognized as Mullissu in seventh-century Nineveh, then capital of the empire, but these two divine names were not necessarily equated elsewhere throughout the empire.⁷¹ At the same time, Meinhold entertains the possibility that Ištar-of-Arbela might have been recognized as Mullissu in the areas surrounding Arbela. Because both of these identifications with Mullissu would have been local and not global, Meinhold argues, the goddess of Nineveh and the goddess of Arbela could still be conceived of as distinct in the Neo-Assyrian period even if they are both equated with the same third divine name elsewhere in the empire.

Meinhold's and other previous studies on Ištar and localized goddesses in the Neo-Assyrian period, including those by Wegner, Beckman, and even Barton's 19th-century scholarship, provide the mythical foundation and textual (and occasionally iconographic) databases from which to explore the relationships between these goddesses across Assyrian history and other cultures. Because these studies and others tackled the difficult theological speculations and abstract phenomena surrounding the unspecified Ištar on a global level, we are now in a place to focus on the local. That is, instead of imagining there was Ištar in Nineveh, in Arbela, and in Assur, we should imagine that the local goddess in each city eventually took on the name Ištar and yet maintained their independence and distinctiveness.

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71 Meinhold 2009, 203–204.

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